

PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

The Auto That Flew

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Level 3





Arjun had three wheels, one headlight and a coat of green and yellow. He belonged to the largest family in the whole of Delhi. Everywhere Arjun went there were brothers, sisters, aunties, uncles and cousins.

‘Go carefully!’ they beeped.

‘Sure!’ he would beep in reply.



Arjun worked hard, day and night.

Pht-pht-tuka-tuka-tuk, he went. **Pht-pht-tuka-tuka-tuk!**

He never complained because Autowallah Sirish worked hard too. Sirishji had old bones that caused him pain. He decorated Arjun’s dashboard with plastic flowers and pictures of movie stars. He quenched Arjun’s thirst for clean gas, even when the queues were long. And whenever Arjun’s canopy was torn, he wasted no time taking it to be patched.



Arjun liked taking whole families to Lajpat Nagar Market. His heart sang when tourists chose three wheels over four. He loved to rest with Sirishji in the shade of a tree outside Qutub Minar.

Arjun never tired of the glamour of Connaught Place at night. He was thrilled by the bustle outside the railway station, and by the crowds that spewed from Feroz Shah Kotla after a cricket match.

Life was good, and Arjun knew he should never wish for more.







But secretly, Arjun did wish for more. Secretly, he wanted to fly. Oh, to have helicopter blades! Arjun thought. They would chop the air above his canopy. Sirishji would wrap his head in a scarf, and the ends of it would flap gaily in the breeze. Off they would go, **pht-pht-tuka-tuka-tuk** in the sky!



But Arjun knew this was only a dream. An auto having helicopter blades would be like an elephant having wings, or a train that could zoom off into space like a rocket, with its carriages trailing behind.

One hot day, Arjun was waiting in a hotch-potch of traffic at a busy intersection. Behind Sirishji sat a grey-haired woman in a dull, well-worn saree.

Pht-pht-pht-pht...





A grubby boy came squeezing between cars and autos, selling water. His eyes sparkled like polished stones as he held out one frosted bottle.

“Ma’am? Very cold... very good... magic.”
The woman laughed. “Magic?”
The boy wobbled his head with such gusto that Arjun thought it might fall off.



"We all need a little magic," the woman said. She produced some rupees and took two bottles from the boy. Immediately, she handed one to Sirishji.



Sirishji smiled broadly, showing the woman his paan-stained teeth. He drank quickly and the traffic budged.

“Already the magic is working,” Sirishji joked. The woman drank too, spilling a little on Arjun as he started forward.

Pht-pht-tuka-tuka-tuk went Arjun, beeping a cheery hello to one of his brothers.



No sooner were they moving than Arjun began to feel light on his wheels. The traffic parted before him and he sailed through.

Astonished by the open road, Sirishji caught the woman’s eye in his rear-view mirror.

“Yes, very magical, ma’am!”

Now the woman’s saree carried a brilliant sheen, and was embroidered with fine gold thread. “Magic…” she chuckled.





Arjun’s wheels lifted off the road. Up, up he went... **Pht-pht-tuka-tuka-tuk...** up, up, up! There were no helicopter blades to help him. Magic, Arjun thought. It’s auto magic!

A flock of birds scattered. Arjun's headlight was lit with joy.





Arjun flew high above Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium and India Gate. He looked upon Humayun's Tomb, the Yamuna River and the gracious temple of Akshardham. He saw a giant web of roads, like the work of a crazy spider.

Wide-eyed, Sirishji began shrieking with the fun of it all. He no longer gripped the handlebar, no longer dodged cars.

The woman fingered her beautiful saree. “Sir,” she called, looking at the rear-view mirror. “Your face!” When Sirishji looked at himself, he saw a face like that of a Bollywood hero. His teeth shone white and his skin was radiant. “We must drink more water,” he roared.





But what are we doing? Arjun wondered. Where can we go? What am I, if I am no longer driven? Never had Arjun been so free. Yet never had he felt so lost.

In the world he had known, every journey had purpose, each destination was temporary.



In boundless quiet above all the honking cars, Arjun missed the roads of his life, jammed with cars, motorcycles and buses. Below, he saw his family at work, dots of yellow canopy glowing bright like beacons.

Arjun even missed the rush and bustle of people, all so eager to arrive somewhere else. Places to go, places to go...**pht-pht-tuka-tuka-tuk...**

The woman looked down and thought of the joys below. It was easy now to forget the shimmer of her saree.

I was going to visit my daughter and grandchildren, she thought. They will be waiting. They are the real magic in my life.





Already, Sirishji was tired of his Bollywood face. What use is it, he wondered. Once he had wished only for this. Now Sirishji wanted only the comfort of his own skin.



Arjun’s headlight had grown dull. He felt aimless. He could read Sirishji’s thoughts. He could sense the woman’s mood.

Lower and lower he flew. The city radiated warmth. The nearer Arjun got, the more energy it gave him.



Sirishji became busy again, drinking in the familiar magic of the city. Every sign and every turning spoke to him. Very soon he could recognise himself again. He knew where he was going. He was already there. The woman's saree became dull, but her face was bright. Down to earth they came.

Arjun's wheels touched warm asphalt and his engine sighed with relief.**Pht-pht-tuka-tuka-tuk...** "Go carefully," beeped a brother from the street corner.

The woman’s grandchildren waved from a window above. She stepped down and handed Sirishji her fare. “Auto! Auto! Auto!” Arjun heard the wonderful cry of a stranger.

Every ride would be new, part of his endless journey, full of surprises.



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The Auto That Flew
(English)

Caught in the mad traffic of Delhi, an auto feels a touch of magic.Take a ride with the driver and the passenger, and feel the feather touch of a little stardust.

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.

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